



# **SUBVERSIVE MEMORY SUBJUGATING MEMORY**

**(Presenting Jesus of Nazareth)**

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"He was born in a small village, the son of a peasant woman.  
He grew up in another village where he worked as a carpenter  
till the age of thirty.  
Then, for three years he became a strolling preacher.  
He never wrote a book. Never held a public office.  
Never had a family or home. Never went to university.  
Never travelled more than 300 kilometres from his place of birth.  
Never achieved anything that is associated with greatness.  
Had no credentials other than himself.  
We was only thirty three years old when public opinion  
turned against him  
His friends abandoned him.  
He was handed over to his enemies, who made fun of him at a trial.  
He was crucified between two thieves.  
And while he agonised *asking God why He had abandoned him*,  
His torturers cast lots on his garments, the only possession he had.  
When he died, he was buried in a tomb that was lent by a friend.  
Twenty centuries have passed, and today he is the central figure of our world,  
a decisive factor in the progress of humanity.  
None of the armies that have marched,  
none of the navies that have sailed,  
none of the parliaments that have met,  
none of the kings that have reigned,  
not even all of them together have changed the life of men on earth  
as this solitary Life".

This anonymous poem, to which I have added the sentence in italics, perfectly describes the amazement and dialectic of Jesus of Nazareth, born and executed in Palestine some two thousand years ago. The same dialectic which expresses the title of this Booklet qualifying his memory as *subversive and subjugating*. Both adjectives are only a modern translation of another play of words, taken from a Biblical sentence that is applied several times to Jesus: the *stone rejected* by the builders, has been converted into *the corner stone* of the building (1).

This dialectic covers at the same time the life of Jesus, which can be described as "a debate on God". A debate maintained with the "official" representatives of God, in which Jesus ends up being accused and *condemned for blasphemy*, and later comes to be *proclaimed as the "Word"* and the "Only Son" of God.

This blasphemy consisted in announcing, putting into practice and making the presence felt of a God that was not the god of religious and political powers but a God of people excluded and marginalised by those powers. In this way that anonymous man, who was no doctor, who held no public office nor wrote books, turned out achieving the greatest spiritual revolution of human history: he established the fact that *the way to God does not pass through Power nor through the Temple, nor through the priesthood, nor through the Law, not even through aesthetics (which Jesus felt very much), but through the excluded people of history*. A revolution that perhaps cannot easily be assimilated by us. But it "is there" - and it is there for us too.

This Booklet attempts to present very summarily this personage so well known and so unknown to most of us. A difficult task since no other individual in human history has been so extensively written about. And this infinite literature has given rise inevitably to an authentic "Babel" of theories and explanations which often have not been exempt from what was prophesised by old Simeon: this child will reveal the condition of many hearts" (see Luke 1, 35).

It is impossible in a short Booklet such as this to make an in-depth study of the Babel we are confronted with. So we would be better off beginning by simply asking several of the first witnesses what Jesus meant for each one of them. It is convenient that we ask *several* just in case the plurality of answers could surprise us. But perhaps it could signify that each answer has *something* to say and no single answer can say *all*.

## **INTRODUCTION: FOUR WITNESSES**

### **1. Paul: liberation of freedom**

I begin with Paul because, like us, he was no immediate witness of the life of Jesus but only of His Resurrection. That fanatical persecutor of Christians that ended up becoming one of them and acting as leader for many of them, lived with the obsession of communicating his experience of Jesus that he summarised saying: the "truth of the gospel" is "*the freedom we have in Jesus the Messiah*" (see Gal 1,5 and 1,4). And this freedom arises from the fact that "in Jesus the Messiah there no longer exists Jewish or pagan, woman or man, freeman or slave" (Gal. 3, 28). A message that was so radical that neither twenty centuries of Christianity have been able to give it sufficient reality.

This freedom emanates from the fact that man no longer needs to win God for himself (nor to reconcile himself with his own superego) on the basis of his moral honourability since "the Messiah has rescued us from the curse of morals" (Gal. 3, 13), without condemning us on this account to the slavery of desire. This is due to the circumstance that in this great "happening of Jesus" the unconditional love of God towards every human being and His being decidedly on the side of mankind have been clearly made manifest.

This unconditional love gives back to the human being the dignity and tranquil confidence in himself that Paul expresses with the Jesus-sounding word "affiliation": Christ came to make us children and His Spirit in us clamours "Abba" (Father) (see Gal. 4, 5-6). Alluding to situations known in his time, Paul qualifies this filial freedom as: a) freedom of the son of a true wife and not of a concubine slave woman; b) freedom that is the dignity of an adult son who is not a minor; and c) freedom that is plural: Paul defines it as the glorious freedom of brothers (see Rom. 8, 21 and Gal. 5, 13).

Consequently, "The Messiah has freed us so that we may live in freedom" (5,1) - a freedom that has nothing to do with the fixing of attention on oneself which would be just another type of slavery (Paul calls it "the slavery of the flesh"). So actions that were before demanded by morals - and other actions that go even further - would now spring according to the conception of Paul from the interior of the human being as a spontaneous reply to the good news of knowing that one is loved by God.

The fact that God permits the death of Jesus on the Cross rather than doing away with His assassins (2), and that Jesus should act in the same way (without having recourse to God to escape from His tormentors) reveals up to what point God and Jesus are on the side of men. To this end Paul says provocatively that he does not wish to presume anything other than the Cross of Christ (Gal. 6, 14) and that he is not interested in knowing anything other than "Jesus Christ and Him Crucified" (1 Cor. 2,2). But the passionate temperament of Paul is aware that speaking in this way is partial so in the same letter he proposes the most important teaching on the Resurrection of the entire New Testament (1 Cor. 15). And in the previous letter he also recognises that when "the heads of the apostles" ratified his gospel of freedom, they recommended too that "he should not forget

the poor" (Gal. 2, 10) which he confesses he had done with all enthusiasm. We now have the chance of passing to a new witness.

## **2. James: the poor of the kingdom (Cf. 2,5)**

James, "the brother of the Lord" who had not believed in Him during Jesus' life, witnessed an apparition of the Risen Lord, and ended up believing in Jesus and being a leader of the Christian community in Jerusalem. It appears he had difficulty integrating his faith in Jesus with his old Jewish religiosity. But these same difficulties served in his experience of Jesus Christ, to underline what was most valid and definitive of the tradition of the Old Testament: *the identity between God and justice*.

Indeed, after his meeting with Jesus, James writes that "the faith in the Glorified Lord" is not compatible with treating the rich better than the poor in the community, because this would be to "blaspheme the beautiful Name that we invoke", since the poor are "the chosen people of God and the heirs of the Kingdom" (see 2, 1-7). If this holds true for the internal relations of the Christian community, it will also lend strength to the diatribes of the prophets against the rich where civil society is concerned. Those that live saying: "we will go to that city, we will do business there and make money" should know that "unpaid salaries to workers raise protests in heaven... and these reach the ears of the Lord"; that they are only "killing the Just One who does not resist", and that some day they will have to face the coming of the Lord (see 4,13 - 5,8). These are practically the only passages in this letter full of norms of conduct that make allusions "to the Lord Jesus Christ" (1,1). But these permit him to go back to the Christian essence of religiosity: "the true religion before God consists in attending to the excluded and the helpless and not allowing oneself to be contaminated by the criteria of this world" (1,27) (3).

From the times of Luther, theology believed that some contradiction could be found between the moralism of this letter and the freedom of the Pauline faith. This contradiction is weakened considerably if we pay attention to the *specific example* that James uses to criticise faith without deeds (2, 15-16): this type of faith could be likened to a person who seeing his brother hungry and cold, would limit himself to saying: "cover yourself up with warm clothing and eat well", without helping him in any way. That is to say: freedom without solidarity is a farce of freedom. Something that Paul too accepts.

Curiously enough, this language reminds one a lot of the gospel of Luke (who was Greek and a disciple of Paul!) which was hard against the rich and had beatitudes for the poor. This shows that though each witness processed the experience of Jesus in his own way, there were many things that they had in common because of their reference to the same Source (see too what we will be saying of St. Mathew in Chapter 2, paragraph 3,1).

## **3. John: the end of religion**

The writings said to be of John are not of one author but of a whole community, and while they were being redacted have passed through different phases. This community appears to have had the most intense experience of Jesus. No other writing of the New Testament speaks so intensely about Jesus. But, *when speaking about Jesus, it speaks about God and about love towards men*. He who does not know the Son does not know the Father (1 Jn. 2,23; Jn. 14,9). But one knows the Son "by keeping His commandment"

(vg. 15,10). This commandment is the one of "Love each other". Although it appears to be an old commandment (in fact it is present in all religions), for the follower of Jesus it is a "new" commandment (1 Jn. 2,7), because Jesus *has converted it into an experience of God*. For this reason, if we love each other "we have passed from death to life and we have known God" (1 Jn. 3,14 and 4,7). On the other hand, if somebody says that he loves God (Who he does not see!) but does not love his brother (who he sees and who he feels little loveable at times) is a fraud (1 Jn. 4,20). The experience, therefore, of God made through Jesus by this community can be resumed in the sentence "God is love" which should not be separated by the other: "God is Light" (1 Jn. 4,7 and 1,5).

We warn that this gospel cannot be reduced to the sentence of Jesus "The Father and I are one", if one does not add to this the commandment of love. Because the first sentence was probably said to mark the difference between Jesus and ourselves and the exclusivity of Christ. To reduce it to a common mystical experience in which one can later incorporate everything runs the danger of incorporating everything except the victims who do not usually fit in with these experiences. The community of John warns expressly against this: "If somebody possessing goods of the earth, sees his brother in need and closes his heart to him, the love of God does not dwell in him" (3, 17).

And let us add that it is precisely the experience of love that opens up Christian life and truth to great creativity; since love (which is the Spirit of God) has still to teach many things and to lead towards the unreachable Plenitude of Truth. Curiously enough, the community that appears to have loved Jesus most (Jesus "incarnated"!) is the one that is least tied to a mere imitation of the historical Jesus on account of its confidence in the gift of Jesus that is the Spirit.

#### **4. Peter: the non-violence of God**

The author of the first letter of Peter appears to project his own experience of Jesus on the recipients of this letter when he tells them that "they have tasted how good the Lord is" (2,3) and on account of that they love and believe in Him without having known Him (1,8). But he wants to warn them that this goodness they love *turns God into something weak and into a stumbling block in this world*, like the stone that was rejected by the builders. (2, 6-7). And he wishes that this remembrance give strength to his readers to bear "being rejected for the sake of Christ" or "to suffer for the sake of being Christians" (4, 14 and 16): because in this way they will follow in the footsteps of Jesus Who did not commit sin nor did they find any deceit in His mouth, Who when insulted did not return insult for insult, nor did He reply to maltreatment with threats, and Whose wounds cured us because - dying for our sins - He opened for us the way for us to die to our sins and live for justice (2, 22-24).

We do not know if Peter is the author of this letter that appears replete with allusions to the Isaias-proclaimed figure of the Servant of Yahweh. But one understands that the letter was put under his name to evoke both Christian conflictivity as well as the remembrance of the person who, before that conflictivity had replied with the sword and had ended up denying the Lord but who finally was regenerated by His pardon. Whatever the case may be, the author of the letter tries to bring about that this non-violent attitude marks not only the social relations of the Christian (2, 10ss), his family (3,1ss) and ecclesial (5,1ss) relations but also his reply to persecution. Because in the measure he participates in the rejection of

the cornerstone, he participates too in its final destiny. This leads to the formulation that "free men are not those who take freedom as a pretext for evil" but those who "by doing good try to close the mouths of fools" (2,15 and 16).

## **IN CONCLUSION**

The memory of Jesus in some of His first witnesses is revealed as a true shaking up in human religiosity and an authentic debate on God. Jesus seems to have spoken little about God. But He put in practice a God that was the *Foundation* of freedom, the *Vindicator* of the excluded, the *One Present* in fraternal love to men and voluntarily *Weak* before human rejection. Henceforth, to opt for God would imply opting for man. And opting for man would imply opting for the poor. But this triple option will be put in practice in a framework of non-violence and respect for the freedom of others. It would be worthwhile to try and see who and how the author of that silent religious revolution was.

## **1. AN APPROACH TO THE FACTS**

Jesus must have been born towards the year 5 before our era. One of His biographers, who assures us that he has looked into the matter most carefully, is not afraid of contradicting the literary category of biographies of great personages, affirming that He was born in a cave that served as a stable or manger. He lived as a child in Nazareth, and as was customary, learnt the profession of his father, which today would come under the "professional group of construction".

### **1. A NARRATIVE SKETCH**

#### **1.1 Expectations**

He must have listened to the preaching of John the Baptist since He went to be baptised by him. With this preaching (or perhaps as a result of a hypothetical contact with a Jewish religious sect called the Esenios) there grew in Him a peculiar experience of God that was accompanied by a particular consciousness of mission. I call it peculiar because it did not fall within any of the four religious/political (4) groups that divided the society in which He lived: neither in the aristocracy of the Sadducees, nor in the group of the practising Pharisees, nor in the group of "monks" of the Esenios, nor in what at that time would be the seed of the revolutionary "zealots" who though inexistent as yet as an organised movement, did exist in the environmental sensitivity. At most we could say that Jesus moved very near these last two, from who He also separated Himself: from the third on account of His refusal to despise the masses and to consider Himself as belonging to the group of the "holy and pure". And from the fourth on account of His rejection of terrorist violence as a liberating means.

More than the Roman denomination itself (5) what appears to have irritated Jesus even more in connection with the Roman Empire was *the collaboration of the sacerdotal aristocracy* (Sadducees) with it. Finally, the fact that Jesus never married gives us another characteristic of the marginalisation that existed in that society.

Approaching 28 and as the result of the above experience, He began to move around in the towns of Galilee, Judea, Samaria and the Decapolis, announcing the imminence of a divine intervention in history which He called the "kingdom of God". It also appears certain that in this itinerary Jesus eluded (deliberately?) the big cities.

That activity seems to have been marked by some "inaugural gesture". In the first place the baptism by John, as though He was just another sinner, and with a kind of "filial" experience that confirmed His mission consciousness. But perhaps there was some other discourse too as that related in Luke 4 at the beginning of the ministry of Jesus, in the synagogue of Nazareth, when Jesus reads chapter 61 of Isaias (suppressing perhaps the sentence that talks of vengeance), and makes the comment that "that was being fulfilled today before them", provoking the first serious conflict.

His praxis was not only verbal. It was accompanied by a series of "eye-catching" healings, contacts and being received by "impure" people, and meals with the socially

excluded. Whatever be the case, His activity unleashed immediately a roaringly successful popular acclaim among the masses and an increasing reticence in "ecclesiastical" circles. The gospels merit credence when they describe Jesus surrounded by "masses", "crowds", "multitudes", and when they relate that those crowds were amazed by the "power of freedom" (*ekousía*) of His words, which were not like those of the Scribes and Pharisees. The beginning of Mark also talks about this clamorous success, and a series of "suspicious" conduct: in the space of just two chapters, Jesus touches a leper (= contracts impurity), calls a publican, breaks twice the law of the Sabbath and attributes to Himself the divine power of forgiving sins. It is almost normal that this way of starting out should lead to a negative verdict by the "well-thinking" people. (see Mark 3,6).

In this very contrasting situation, it seems historically certain that Jesus rejected the way of power that some evangelist describes as an attempt to "proclaim Him king".

## **1.2 Crisis**

Towards the middle of His public life, an important crisis was produced: His disciples frequently receive the reproach of not understanding. The people too appear to be disconcerted (and an evangelist puts in the lips of Jesus this hard reproach. "you look for Me not because you understand My signs but because you have eaten to satiety"). The Pharisees ask Him for an irrefutable sign which Jesus refuses to give. The crisis led Him to put His disciples to the test. It seems certain that thanks to an impulsive and generous confession of Peter, the disciples start resolving their bewilderment (6). They and the people in their wake were attracted more by the force of His irradiation than on account of having understood Him fully.

The second part of His way, appears to have been marked by a more clouded horizon. Although the crisis does not alter the "touched bowels" of Jesus that were the driving force of all His activity, a search for new ways is noted: less appearances in public, more dedication to His disciples, and some periods of refuge abroad (7). The testimony of the gospels seem credible too when, in this second half, they relate very much less healings and "miraculous" acts of Jesus.

## **1.3 The outcome**

The confrontation persists until Jesus decides to face it, by going up to Jerusalem to take it to the very centre of His Jewish faith. His stay in Jerusalem follows a similar pattern to that of His previous years: Clamorous success on His arrival (with the concomitant fear of the religious leaders), days of controversy in the atrium of the Temple, some shaking words of Jesus regarding Jerusalem in which He defined the religious capital as one which "kills prophets and stones those who have been sent by God" and, finally, the decision of the High Priests to accelerate the "final solution". According to the chronology of the gospels, less than a week in Jerusalem, and between one or two years of activity in Palestine. Up to this point He was so upsetting.

The biographical account does not permit us to say much more. But contrary to what is usually thought, this is not only unfortunate but is also an expression of a certain desired anonymity. One of the most ancient hymns believing in Jesus proclaims that His "divine condition" was not an obstacle to Him presenting Himself as "one of so many and acting as an ordinary man" (Phil. 2,7ss). A presentation of Jesus would fail if the reader

did not succeed in imagining Him as one of the common run: one more among the sinners who approached John to be baptised; walking along the streets as an ordinary man, without any type of carriage or "Jesus-mobile-van" that would distinguish Him from the rest of the people; dressed as the Galileans of His time; using the baths and public pools with the possibility of approaching those who were there (see John 5, 2ss) and without the necessity of building His own exclusive installations; dealing precisely with those who we normally do not deal with, and not with those others who the important and the heads of this world usually rub shoulders with. The precariousness of His biography is the expression of that anonymity that is the essential factor of His theology.

## 2. THE ACTIVITY OF JESUS

This notwithstanding, it is still possible to draw from the preceding picture some of the concrete forms of His activity. In those barely two years Jesus:

- a) *He communicated and announced* (more than taught) what the Kingdom of God that was arriving was. The amazement His teaching aroused was due to this (see Mark 1,22), the beatitudes, the parables etc. We will amplify this point in the following chapter.
- b) *He shared table*, interests and feelings with the excluded of that society (cf. Mark 2,15ss; Luke 15,1; Mt. 11,25ss).
- c) *He welcomed and healed*, understanding those actions as signs of the arrival of the Kingdom (Luke 11,20).
- d) *He called a few simple people* to follow Him in the style of life that He had adopted (8). It seems certain that He sent them to announce the Kingdom and He tried to build with them a type of "alternative community" that would not abide by the criteria of the civil society of that time, that Jesus summed up like this: "those that govern tyrannise and in addition wish to be called "benefactors" (see Luke 22,25ss: this should not be so among you").
- e) *He got into conflict with the official theology* (in matters such as the Sabbath, what the purity of man consists in, who God is with, what is the meaning and value of the Law...).
- f) *He got into conflict with the Temple and the official cult*, permitting Himself even an action of certain harshness when He upturned the whole set-up of sales that made the cult possible, and declaring that that Temple was destined to disappear and be substituted by another "not made by human hands".
- g) *He made some people feel it necessary to get rid of Him* in a violent and exemplary fashion. A necessity that was justified in the name of God, but which proceeded from the sensation of the threat that accompanied His announcement of the God of the Kingdom.
- h) When He saw the end coming, *He betted on hope* to such a point that He decided to celebrate a dinner with His own (9). At this dinner He made a symbolical gesture that the Christian communities still repeat: He shared bread (symbol of human need) and passed around a cup of wine (symbol of communicated joy), giving to understand that in this gesture of shared need and communicated joy, His life was summed up and He would be present among His own.

## CONCLUSION

Let us close this quick panoramic view pointing out that of all the titles modern investigation has given to Jesus (which do not attempt to be titles of believers but "flashes" of the personage), the two most satisfactory ones are those that describe Him as "*a marginal Jew*" and as an "*eschatological prophet*" or "of the end of time" (that, I repeat, is not a title of a believer, given that no pronouncement is made about the veracity of this prophet). These snapshots appear to me preferable to other titles (a wise man, a saint, a revolutionary, and an itinerant similar to the Greek cynics...).

Perhaps, to these two titles chosen, we could add that of (Son of) *The Man*: because it seems very probable that it is in this way that Jesus styled Himself, and because it implies a certain ambiguity that is very much to the liking of Jesus: though it could allude to "any common man" (cf. Phil.2) it alludes too to the Utopian plenitude of the human being (for this account I write it in capital letters). All this will be seen with more clarity when we develop these snapshots a little bit more in the following chapter.

## **2. THE PERSONAGE: MARGINAL, PROPHETIC, HUMAN**

What constitutes a human being is his human conscience. But we have no immediate access to this conscience. We can only draw close to the human being through his words, through his acts and his style, especially when these are habitual.

But given the fact that the ancient notion of historiography is not exactly ours, the criterion to gain access to the personage cannot be isolated texts (although a few do offer very serious guarantees) but should be the *confluence of texts that trace a trait*, even though some could possibly be of doubtful historicity. We will look for access to Jesus through the following features.

### **1. "ABBA" AND KINGDOM**

There are two words that no critic argues were repeated by Jesus with notable frequency: the invocation to God as *Abba* (Father) and the near advent of the *Reign* of this God. Jesus invited His disciples to call God *Abba*. But to understand correctly what is signified by that paternity, we can only do so by considering what Jesus Himself understood by the Reign of God. These are some of the ways of access to this "Kingdom" that reveals God.

#### **1.1 Surrounding testimonies**

In the first place the description given in Psalm 145. The Psalm enumerates a human situation of freedom, justice, the overcoming of sickness and need, goodness and the welcoming in of the weak. When this occurs "God reigns".

There are besides two useful texts in the apocryphal gospels: "the Kingdom of the Father is *extended over the earth but men do not see it*" (Gospel of Thomas 113). And this other: "He who knows God will find the Kingdom because *knowing Him you will know yourselves* and you will understand that you are children of the Father. And at the same time you will know that you are citizens of heaven. You are the city of God" (*Pap Oxyr. 654*) (10)

The above two texts are very rich in meaning and the words marked in italics give us subject matter for thought.

I choose these quotations not because they have more guarantee of historicity (given their sources, it is not possible to affirm this) but because they sum up very well the teaching of the gospels about the Kingdom. We can add these other two quotations of Paul: "The Kingdom of God is not food or drink but justice and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 14,17), that is to say, equality among men, reconciliation with oneself and the referring of all this to Gratuity. And again, "The Kingdom of God does not come through words but through its own strength" (1 Cor. 4,20), in the line of the gospel of Thomas, quoted above.

## 1.2 The praxis of Jesus

In the second place Jesus Himself appears to have interpreted His healing task as a "sign that the Kingdom of God is arriving", and not as a demonstration of supernatural power that guarantees His Divinity. This last interpretation although it appears more traditional, proceeds from our Modernity. The Pharisees did not question either the healings of Jesus or their "strange" character. They tried to explain these off by attributing them to magical arts or to the devil. And that gave occasion to Jesus to explain how He understood them (see Luke 11,20).

## 1.3 His parables

In the third place, let us highlight two characteristics of the parables:

- a) The Kingdom of God is like a hidden treasure. He who discovers it will have so much joy that gladly he will give all that he has for it (Mt. 13,44ss): it is like a seed that, looked after well, keeps growing by itself, although the farmer sleeps (Mark 4, 26ss). And nevertheless
- b) a controversial point makes its appearance once again: in this Kingdom it is not the "moral" people (the Pharisees and Scribes) who enter but those excluded for their immorality ("publicans and prostitutes"). Because the morality of the established (dis)order is morality without solidarity that by its excluding action forces many people to these immoral conducts.

Let us put one example of this in the parable of those that attend the banquet (Luke 14, 15-22). The public banquets of the rich were a well-known practice in the times of Jesus, and He has recourse to this parable to make visible the Reign of God, but changing the ones sitting at table. It is easily understandable that those who do not want to attend a banquet will make up excuses.

In real fact the justifications could be valid. The possibility of a good business deal is a reasonable excuse not to attend a banquet, then and today. To have just married was a reasonable excuse since in the world of Jesus, banquets were not for women but only for men. And he who is in the middle of a honeymoon, it is understandable that he cannot renounce it...

In this parable (as in many others (11)) Jesus denounces the occurrence of many morally plausible conducts that usually end up justifying or concealing a lack of solidarity with the weak and excluded while those who do not adopt those conducts are more open to heeding the call for solidarity.

We begin to find here how the announcement of the Kingdom is at one and the same time, subjugating and subversive. The announcement of Jesus in respect of the Kingdom of God can be re-phrased today as: "the Revolution of God is here. Believe this good news and change your mentality" (cf. Mark 1,15). The God that this announcement reveals has the same subversive and subjugating character. The paternity of God is no joke: not only because it is about a paternity of *adult* men but also because it is a paternity *of all* (12).

## **2. A STRANGE FREEDOM**

The society in which Jesus moved was a notably closed society. In the matter of customs, it had over the centuries not moved an inch. Jesus did not appear to have had any contact with the Judaism of the Diaspora which was more critical and illustrated by Greek influence.

It is surprising for this reason that from the beginning, without renouncing His practices of a practising Jew, He went about acting with a disconcerting freedom in matters so serious as keeping the Sabbath, the social ways of dealing with women, the norms of purity or the contact with pagans and Samaritans, or that He should manifest Himself against what He considered permissiveness of the Law of Moses in questions such as the repudiation of a wife, alleging that Moses had made concessions to the hard-heartedness of men but that this was not the original plan of God regarding the human couple (13).

### **2.1 Freedom that gives authority**

The gospels describe this freedom of Jesus with the word *eksousía*. It is a word that means both authority (or power) and freedom. And it appears with both meanings in the New Testament. It is for this that I have translated it before as "the power of His freedom". It is the only power that Jesus claimed to have. And this is how we are to understand the surprised and often repeated comments of the people regarding His words: "From where does this *authority* come since He has not studied with a teacher?... A characteristic that also appears to confirm the fourth gospel: "nobody has ever spoken like this man" (7,48).

### **2.2 Freedom in favour of the needy**

Regarding all this freedom, there is place here only for one example. We will choose that of the Sabbath, on account of its importance in the Jewish world, and the abundance of testimonies regarding this in the gospels. Jesus on several occasions broke the Sabbath, especially when it was a question of healing someone on that day, disobeying the prudent counsel of waiting another day of the week and alleging that to do good on the Sabbath could in no way be banned since the sacred day was made for man and not the other way round.

Curiously enough, we can guess today that this transgressing practice has given back to the Sabbath its true theological meaning. In its origins the Sabbath was a social institution, not one of cult: its aim was the rest of the hired labourer and the slave, and the basis was sought (as was frequent in many prescriptions of the old world) in the "sacredness" of the holiday: in which God rested from His creation" (Gen. 2,2). It can be deduced from this that God's rest is precisely the relief of the needy. And this is why Jesus understood that by giving relief to the sick person He was in no way breaking the Sabbath, on the contrary, He was fulfilling its deeper intention: this is what is meant by the Sabbath being made for man. And this is how the fourth gospel understands it when it makes Jesus say, against the literal interpretation of the Bible: "My Father keeps working" (John 5,17)... as long as there is a sick man to be cured.

The objection that it would have been better to wait for another day of the week, since it was not a question of urgent cures, was not a valid argument for Jesus, although it meant throwing stones on to His own roof, since it discredited His cures precisely because they were done transgressing the Law ("this man does not come from God because He does not keep the Sabbath"). By rejecting this way of arguing, Jesus seems to make clear that the importance of His healings lay not in the working of miracles but in the person of the sick man.

Finally, by attributing the cure to the faith of the sick person, and not to His own powers, Jesus removes the binomial "sickness-cure" from the field of the supernatural and the magical and returns it to the field of creation, that is in the hands of man. Hence the commentary of the Fathers of the Church: Jesus healed not for us to see how much power He had, but for us to know that we too can cure.

### **3. FROM THE MARGINS**

Together with "eksousia", the other word that the gospels use most to describe Jesus is that of the "bowels moved with compassion". Before the sick, before the thousands of suffering humans, before personal situations, before the multitudes, the gospels repeat a well-known Greek word which means that "his bowels were moved" (14). So with "Abba", the Kingdom, the authority of His freedom and the bowels moved with compassion, one can conjure up a quick impressionist picture that could be validated by historical criticism.

#### **3.1 Social marginalisation...**

The term "bowels moved with compassion" denotes in a clear way that Jesus' life did not move in the centre or from the centre, but from the margins, from all those nuclei of people that the drive for individual affirmation keeps casting along the roadsides. Very reliable is the text in which Jesus declares that He feels being sent only for the "lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Mt. 15,24). And, probably, we should not look for in Him an ambition of universal mission right from the start. This in no way is contrary to the attitude Jesus adopted later as a result of the explicit exclusion that the Jewish religion made of the non-Jewish by which He made a thousand gestures of welcome to the pagans, in who the primitive church would find the basis for going out to the whole world. His bowels moved with compassion placed a long-range bomb in the heart of Jewish individualism. And perhaps it is of use to us in these times when so much is spoken of universalism and of "globalisation": the empires of this earth should know that globalisation does not consist in closing one's own doors and imposing their own products and own culture. There cannot be true globalisation, if one does not begin by "globalising one's own house", and by integrating all the lost sheep, before trying to conquer other worlds and markets.

"Bowels moved with compassion" enables Mathew to overcome the problem of the relation between the Old and New Testament with a sentence from the prophet Oseas which shows how the former survives all ruptures: what God wants is "mercy and not cult" (Mt. 9,13 and 12,7). And, given that this is what God wants, in the Last Judgement of man before God what will matter really is not what one has wanted to do directly to God but what one has done directly to the hungry brother or the sick person (15). In this way, the sentence quoted earlier of James on true religion, is reformulated by Mathew with a

sentence of Jesus: "if when you go to present your offering at the altar, you remember that your brother has something against you, leave the altar and go to reconcile yourself with your brother" (5, 22-24). It would have little meaning to discuss if these are the literal words of Jesus or proceed from the evangelist, since in this second case, it would be even more serious for us because we would not then be able to discredit it saying that it refers to the cult of the Old Testament. And given that when the evangelists modify the words of Jesus, they usually make them softer, one is staggered by the intensity of the experience of Jesus that Mathew put in those words to which not even in twenty centuries have we Christians been able to explore their full meaning.

### 3.2 .... grounded on a religious basis

This law of gravity towards marginalised people can be symbolised in a graph that consists of two crossed arrows (vertical and horizontal), the ends of which point out four dynamics of exclusion and marginalisation: upwards, downwards and sideways in both directions: the sick, the poor, women and foreigners. In a society that one confesses is founded by God and declares that it has God in its centre, these centrifugal lines will appear as coming from God and sanctioned by Him. And so it occurred in the world of Jesus.

- Sinners were the sick and this often justified their social marginalisation, closing a vicious cycle that made healing them a difficult task; "impure" were the lepers and on this account it was necessary to stand apart from them; and before the person born blind the apostles asked Jesus who had sinned, he or his parents, that he should be in this condition. Jesus, on the other hand, healed people not to show His divinity but the strength of the Kingdom in the human being ("your faith has saved you"). Traditional apologetics was quite blind on this point.
- Sinners were also the poor - "that mass that did not know the Law and were under a curse" (John 7,49) - because all they could do was get themselves deeper in debt until their very debt ended up forcing them to hand themselves over as slaves, or flee to the mountains, or make them part of the zealot movement (16). If in the words of Jesus there appear banquets and debts, it is not by coincidence but is a reflection of the condition of His society. The only peculiarity is that Jesus inverts the terms: in the banquet of the Kingdom, the lead actors are those who have never attended any of those big Sadducee feasts. And all are forgiven their debts except those who do not forgive their own debtors.
- Sinners were the foreigners and the pagans, about who we have already spoken in the previous chapter. But that pious Jew did not hesitate to call at the house of a pagan who was suffering (17). And He, who valued faith so much and who so often reproached His own for their "little faith", publicly praised the faith of someone only in two passages. And on both occasions the recipients of His praise were pagans (the Roman centurion and the Syro-Phoenician woman).
- And if not sinners, women were considered inferior beings both in the Greek as well as Jewish society, unauthorised by these societies to be witnesses or to study the Law. This point deserves a further explanation because today it is very difficult for us to perceive the subversiveness of Jesus' conduct.

Apart from some accounts that have already been mentioned, it was strange to see Him walking by the side of women in a society in which even the wife was supposed to walk behind her husband when both were out in the street. Whoever he was, he knew well the

Jewish world when he wrote that (even His apostles) "were surprised to see Him talking to a woman" in public (John 4, 27). This was how the Galilean walked: teaching the Law of God to women too and making it clear that *also for them* this was "the better part" (Luke 10, 24). He established with many women a deep egalitarian friendship that called people's attention more since this friendship was found in One Who taught that dedication to the Kingdom and the passion for it, could reach the point of "incapacitating" certain human beings from having a normal conjugal relationship adding that "he who is capable of understanding this, let him do so" (see Mt. 19, 12).

Besides women, it would be convenient today to add a word about other "inferior" beings of that society: children. The words of Jesus about "receiving the Kingdom like children", or "converting ourselves into children to be able to enter the Kingdom", should not be understood considering the smiling, charming faces of children that appear so often in so many spaces of our social life; the words would be better understood in the context of Brazilian *meninos da rua* or working children. "Make yourselves like them" would mean situating ourselves in marginalised society to be able to have access to the Kingdom. Adding another typical trait of infancy: the child knows (and the examples we have quoted know this even better) all they have got is what they have received. Gratuity and marginalisation are not contradictory in the mind of Jesus.

*There, in the margins of society that marginalised and free Jew found God. This made Him exult with joy and bless God (see Mt. 11, 25ss). From the margins of society Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom and from those margins He invited all to prepare His Kingdom. On account of this many were not able to understand Him. And for this reason (as we will see), He died "outside the gates of the city" (Heb. 13,12).*

#### **4. A STRANGE DIALECTIC VIS-À-VIS THE HUMAN BEING**

It is a known and lamented fact that the gospels describe very little what took place in Jesus' interior. Because of this the following hard words of the evangelist deserve special attention: "many believed in Him, but Jesus did not trust them... He had no need for them to inform Him about men because He knew what was in men" (John 2, 23-25). It is surprising then that this distrusting man is precisely the one who has demanded and expected most from human beings. It is probable that the expression "I will make you fishers of men" that is the only program that He presented to His followers when He called them, does not have a numerical meaning of proselytism but a significance of drawing the best human quality from this turbulent sea of inhumanity that we human beings are accustomed to be. To draw "the best possible version" from each person, in line with what the Prophets announced: "to change the heart of stone into a heart of flesh", or to draw out that free human being with his bowels moved with compassion, that one could describe as "the man of the Kingdom", in consonance with the Kingdom of God announced by Jesus.

Jesus was conscious that many conducts that are morally and religiously correct do not do otherwise than disguise self-complacency, hard-heartedness and lack of solidarity, or the desire to be seen. He believed that men have different yardsticks depending upon whether they are judging others (here they do not allow even a mote to go unnoticed) or themselves (in which case they are incapable of seeing even authentic beams); He knew that frequently the blindest people appoint themselves guides of the blind; He counted on human beings being able to kill "thinking that they are doing a service to God" (John 16,3).

And He must have quite often used words like "hypocrites or hypocrisy" that in the whole of the New Testament only appear (and quite frequently so) on the lips of Jesus.

But of this whole issue that Machiavello could very well have subscribed to, Jesus did not draw the conclusion of the Florentine (take advantage of human misery to draw profit for Himself), but He asked His own not to be afraid, "because His Father was pleased with them". I believe it is possible to affirm without any sort of apologetics that though He knew, as everybody else, what betrayal and disenchantment was, *nobody has drawn out more from men than Jesus*. He really seems to have been an authentic "fisher of men". But one must not understand these words in a falsely "supernatural" sense but in the setting of the New Testament that describes Jesus as "presenting Himself as a common man and acting as any common person" (Phil. 2,7).

At the same time, this apparently hard man, turned out shockingly understanding when it was a question of, not what He detested as hypocrisy, but of simple human weakness (see John 8, 1ss). Except the epithet of "fox" addressed to the little tyrant on duty, there never appeared on His lips a negative judgement on specific people. Jesus was brutal with groups or types of human beings that could come under two categories: a) the rich who "as they loved money laughed at Him" (Luke 16,14), and who Jesus naively asked to put all that they had for the service of the poor (see Luke 12, 33); and b) those Pharisees that Jesus accused of having hearts not just hardened but blindly "deadened" (Mark 3,5). In this blindness of heart that always finds reasons only for what is convenient to it, Jesus seems to see the root of that hypocrisy that He so often denounced. Because that acted as a brake on the undeniable "capacity of meeting" that that man appeared to have possessed and which brought about that His welcome of others was for many of His interlocutors a source of being at peace with themselves, of self-esteem, of mental health, of expulsion of devils and a sign of God's forgiveness. To this capacity of meeting Oscar Wilde appears to have been referring to when he writes that for Jesus there were no laws - there only existed exceptions. But again in contrast with the denunciations of this possessive and hypocritical background of the human being, the invitation of Jesus is extended "to have clean eyes" because with clean eyes, the whole body becomes transparent and gets illuminated (see Luke 11, 34-36). And this way our dialectic could carry on. But we have still some chapters left.

## **5. HIS STYLE**

The opening text of this Booklet proclaimed that Jesus "did not go to university nor wrote any book". Nevertheless, we perceive in the gospels a clear contrast between the beauty of many words placed on the lips of Jesus and the rather simple style of the evangelists.

His language proceeded from the observation of details, of southern colour and dialectic. His language uses elements such as yeast with which a woman kneads bread, the very small size of some seeds which later grow more than what would seem possible, or the two cents that an insignificant old woman gives in alms and to which Jesus pays more importance than the cheques the lords of this world give because in those cents was placed the whole heart of the old woman whereas with the cheques it was just a way of calming themselves or calling the attention of others (see Mark 12, 41ss). His language reflects a graphic way of describing hypocrisy as "straining out the gnat and swallowing the camel".

And this double manner of being simple as doves and "cunning" as serpents, or of "doing one thing without forgetting the other".

His deepest sayings were not deep because they were inaccessible to simple people but because they had different levels of reading according to the depth of the hearer. Contrary to Greek wisdom, He preferred to speak more of the things we see than of essences that we do not see; but the hearer felt himself raised to the latter through the former. He resorted much to the narrative category, probably because to God as well as to suffering (although for different reasons) one gains access not through abstract notions but only through narration.

And His words frequently found the ethical radicalism of the language of the prophets of Israel, with the wise tone of him who knows how to look for what is more convenient to him such that the option for the poor, for non-violence, for hunger of justice, mercy, cleanness of heart, for the work for peace and even persecution, were not for him hard commands from the outside, but unexpected ways of happiness: "blessed are those". This is one of those abrupt games of light that made many of His words produce dizziness. And in the face of this dizziness, He limited Himself to giving men the power of God.

One gets the impression that towards the end of His life, His language hardened somewhat. This has some relation to the last point that we are going to present.

## **6. THE UNEXPECTED CONFLICTIVITY**

The *fact* and the intensity of that conflictivity were already mentioned in the previous chapter. But to say a word about their *contents*, let us add now that the figure and the words of that man posed an unexpected threat for all well-placed people of that society, and perhaps they also brought about the disenchantment of some who at the beginning had got quite enthusiastic about Him. The reaction and the decision to finish off with Him were incredibly swift. Perhaps because nothing turns the human being more aggressive nor more ignoble than panic. And those men had a quick insight that the Kingdom of God announced by Jesus would suppose an end to their privileges.

On the other hand, there was something in that "gentle and humble-hearted" man that unleashed His aggressiveness. It was seeing how the Name of God was being falsified, how it was used as a reason not to do good, or making use of the cult of God as a basis for differences of treatment among men (between Jew and Gentile, man and woman, between layman and priest). This seems to have been the reason for the scene He created in the Temple on His first visit to Jerusalem, and after He had cried over the city as any of His followers would do so today over the Vatican. The "expulsion of the Temple merchants" was not just a mere denunciation of (unavoidable?) economic abuses, but the discrediting of a form of cult that had made sacred those differences between people. At that moment in time Jesus literally jumped since to His mind the only differences that really existed for God were rooted in His radical partiality towards marginalised people.

It is a fact that the Gospels are marked by the sharp darts that Jesus hurled at the "ecclesiastics" of His time and these the evangelists tried to conserve later so that the same situations would not be repeated in the Christian Church: "You are breaking the will of God, taking refuge in your traditions... They eat up the resources of widows with the

excuse of praying for them... You pay the small tax of mint and cumin, and you "disregard" what God wants most: justice and mercy... They kill the prophets sent by God and then presume to be His children ... They dress religious symbols ("thread" symbols) as though God looks at the exterior... The house of My Father is not a cave of thieves..." (see in Mt. chapters 15, 23, 6 and 21).

So, with "the mane let loose and tenderness let loose" (P. Casaldáliga), Jesus fought against the false human images of God, deformed by fear and interests. For this reason perhaps the Japanese E. Susaku was right when he affirmed that in Jesus a slight trace of sadness was perceptible. Since in this world, true love cannot help being affected by the weight of a certain sadness.

The Gospels seem to testify too that towards the end of His life, the language of the Kingdom diminished and Jesus made use of a category of His time called "apocalyptic" that describes or announces calamities, not so much as a prediction but as a warning, and to proclaim that despite these, God still remains the Lord of history. But this apocalyptic language seems to be prefigured in one of the most serious (and most forgotten) sentences of the gospels which reveal how Jesus (in spite of that confidence in man that we have remarked before) was fully conscious of the conflictivity of His message: *the announcement of the Kingdom of God does not fit in with the containing vessels of this world*; it would be like putting new wine in old wineskins or putting a patch of new cloth on an old and worn-out fabric (see Mt. 9, 16ss). Either the taste is altered, or the cloth will tear. Christian churches know well up to what point their history oscillates between these two extremes: the dilution of the legacy with many reforms or the destruction of the structure which they have sprung from.

This is the explosive strength of that image of God that Jesus had announced with another of His strange dialectics that we find difficult to harmonise but which, besides resuming the whole of this chapter, explains both the conflictive and subversive as well as the subjugating and indelible elements of His passage through history. On the one hand, "one cannot serve God and wealth" (Mt. 6,24); it's just that simple, although our world will deny it. On the other hand it is not possible to love God if one does not love man (Mt. 22,34ss). It is not that the both loves are the "same" but it is *impossible* to separate the two. Although the churches find it difficult to understand.

## CONCLUSION

If our interpretation of the truth is valid, the exactitude of the words of J.B. Metz would perhaps be understood better: "Jesus was neither a mad man nor a revolutionary; but He so palpably resembled the one and the other that He gave people a handle to mistake Him to be both". At the end, Herod treated Him as a fool and His fellow-citizens handed Him over to be crucified as a subversive element. Those who wish to follow Him ... should count on the possibility of falling a victim to this misunderstanding" (18).

And if these words are exact, they will lead us by the hand, as it were, to the following chapter of this Booklet.

### 3. HIS DESTINY

His end - a death reserved only for slaves and terrorists, the most terrible of that era, is well known to all (19). The striking sobriety of the synoptic gospels when narrating His death has very often been commented upon. They keep aloof from any hagiographic tones of martyrdom or aggression. And it must be added too that this end was *the logical result of His life*: Jesus did not die by some "metaphysical" or divine expiatory plan, that needed innocent blood to placate His justice, but because of the way He had lived.

The evangelists present Jesus announcing His passion to the apostles with a wealth of details that lead one to think that these prophecies were redacted by them after the events had occurred and that the confessions or the words that Jesus had used to confide His initial fears were retouched. The confessions unleashed in Peter a contrary reaction, his opposition springing from the idea he had been harbouring in his mind of what the Messiah should be, and this upset Jesus profoundly to the point of calling him Satan (see Mark 8, 27-33) (20).

Let us not talk here of the Cross, but of the total solitude that accompanied Jesus. Jesus was crucified in the name of God, by the decision of the religious authorities, abandoned by His disciples (one of whom betrayed Him and another denied Him in public), betrayed too by those crowds that had followed Him and now shouted "Crucify Him", manipulated as they were by the reigning authorities (21). A "stranger" had to help Him carry the Cross, because of His inability to cope with it alone. And around His Cross, only one disciple with a group of women faithful to Him up to the end displaying more courage than the other disciples (22). Those who had succeeded in getting Him to die, freed now from the fear that they had felt towards Him, mocked Him at the foot of the scaffold, offering to "dialogue" with Him and showing their good disposition to hear Him provided God brought Him down from the Cross.

Neither God nor Jesus accepted this blackmail. But one can understand what totally black moments Jesus must have gone through which led Him to stumble and feel and cry out aloud: "Oh my God, why have you abandoned me?" And it is amazing how in the midst of that black night Jesus was able to find the strength to assume His own death, giving up His life without them taking it away from Him, and exclaiming again in a loud voice: "Abba, into Your hands I give up My spirit." Because of this Jon Sobrino writes that, if in the first part of His life, Jesus understood that He had to put for the service of God all that He *had*, in the second half of His journey He understood that He had to put for the service of the Kingdom all that He *was*. This jump from the abandonment of God to the hands of a Father indelibly marks the depths of our history, whether we like it or not. The later Christian community understood that this leap could only be the work of the Spirit of God (Heb. 9,14). It was this that makes one understand how one of the soldiers that was present there, "on seeing how He had died, went down the mountain saying: "Really this Man was the Son of God" (Mark 15,39).

## **4. CONCLUSION**

The anonymous text which we quoted at the beginning of this Booklet spoke of the permanence and influence of Jesus in the memory and history of humanity. Those who through the Paschal events, ended up believing in Him, expressed that faith by confessing that the man Jesus was the Presence and the Mark of Divinity itself in this human history (the "Son" of God). On this account, those who profess that faith must necessarily keep away from making the cult to the divinity of Jesus become a way of escaping from the interpellation of His humanity. Because if one falls a prey to that temptation, one loses not simply something that is humanly precious but loses God Himself since one would be disregarding one of the fundamental teachings of the New Testament: that Jesus "although He was the Son" learnt through His own sufferings and through His own human history that the plenitude of man can only be attained in a dialectic attitude of acceptance and trust (what in the New Testament is called "obedience" - see Heb. 5,8-9).

We must acknowledge that historical Christianity frequently succumbed to that temptation, especially since when those who would later become the "vicars of Christ" accepted being proclaimed kings contrary to the express example of Jesus. One of the big tasks of Christianity in the future is to get the subversive and rejected memory of that way of being human to be converted once again into its cornerstone. But this would imply that if he now understands and accepts the title of this Booklet the reader would need to ask himself *what he (believer or not) could do* to get this cornerstone to no longer remain a stone rejected by the builders of this world (23).

## **APPENDIX: FOUR OTHER TESTIMONIES OF TODAY**

### **1. FROM THE WESTERN WORLD**

#### **1.1 Europe**

Under the reign of Tiberius approximately, nobody knows exactly where or when a personage whose name is not known, made an opening in the horizon of men. He was certainly no philosopher or tribune, but he must have lived in such a way that his whole life presented this meaning: any one of us can at any point in time begin a new future.

Tens, hundreds perhaps of popular narrators related this good news. We know of three or four. The impact they had experienced was expressed by them with the same images that the poor and oppressed use when they dream that everything has now turned possible: the lame person who begins to walk, the hungry in the desert who receive bread, the prostitute in whom the woman in her awakens, the dead son who is reborn to life.

To make this cry reach fulfilment, He Himself through His Resurrection announced that all limits, including death, had been conquered.

Some erudite person may question one by one the facts of His existence. However, despite everything, this certitude that transforms life remains immutable. A bonfire has been lit. Therefore, the spark or the first flame that set it ablaze and gave birth to the bonfire must have existed.

The bonfire comprised at the beginning a handful of poor people; if this had not been the case, the "establishment", from Nero to Diocletian, would not have treated them so harshly.

In this man, love must have been militant, subversive. If it had not been so, they would not have crucified Him.

Up to then all forms of wisdom had died a natural death, a result of inexorable destiny and fate. He made manifest the absurdity of those forms of wisdom. He demonstrated the contrary of inexorable destiny: freedom, creation, life. He redeemed history from the claws of fate.

With Him were fulfilled the promises of heroes and martyrs that accompanied the great dawn of freedom. Not only the hopes of Isaias or the anger of Ezechiel. Prometheus ceased from being chained. Antigona, buried alive behind walls, was able to leave her tomb. Chains and walls, mythical images of inexorable destiny were razed to the ground. Idols all fell dead and man dawned. It was like the new birth of man.

I look at that Cross that is His symbol, and I dream of all those who have broadened this breach... I dream of all those who have made us conscious of the fact that man is far too big to be reduced and concerned exclusively about himself.

You, people of the Church, distrustful of the great hope that Constantine stole from us, will you please give us back that hope! His life and death are ours too as also of those for whom they have some meaning. All of us who have learnt from Him that man has been created creator... (R. GARAUDY, in *El Ciervo*, 1970, pg.5).

## 1.2 Latin America

What makes a great impact about Jesus is mercy and the primary importance He gives to this virtue; there is nothing further nor closer than mercy, and from mercy He defines the truth of God and of the human being. What makes a great impact about Jesus is His honesty with what is real and His drive for truth, His judgement regarding the situation of the oppressed majorities and the oppressing minorities: to be the voice of those who have no voice, and the voice against those who have too much voice; ... to be the defender of the weak and to denounce and unmask oppressors. What makes a great impact about Jesus is His fidelity to maintaining honesty and justice up to the end despite internal crises and external persecutions. What makes a great impact about Jesus is His freedom to bless or curse, go to the synagogue on a Sabbath and violate it, freedom, finally, from everything that could be an obstacle to doing good. What makes a great impact about Jesus is that He wants an end to the misfortunes of the poor and desires the happiness of His followers; the beatitudes stem from there. What makes a great impact about Jesus is that He welcomes sinners and the excluded, that He sits at table with them and He is happy that God reveals Himself to them. What makes a great impact about Jesus is His signs - only modest signs of the Kingdom - and His utopic horizon that embraces the whole of society, the whole world and history. Finally, what makes a great impact about Jesus is that He trusts in a good and close-by God whom He calls Father, and before this Father Jesus whilst remaining God is always available: a mystery that can in no way be manipulated.

To see incarnated in one and the same person each of these qualities, honesty and truth, mercy and fidelity, freedom, happiness and celebration, the pettiness of things immediate and tangible and the greatness of Utopia, confidence in the Father and availability before God is always a breath of fresh air. To see people like this is good news. But what makes a great impact too and perhaps even more than what has been mentioned before is the existence in one and the same person of qualities that are not easily unitable. Jesus is at the same time a man of mercy (*misereor super turbas*) and of prophetic denunciations ("woe betide you, the rich"), a man of austerity ("he who wishes to be My disciple, let him take up his cross and follow Me") and delicate feelings ("your faith has made you whole"), a man of confidence in God ("*Abba*", Father) and of solitude before God ("Oh my God, why have you abandoned me?"). (JON SOBRINO, *La fe en Jesucristo. Ensayo desde las víctimas*, Madrid 1999, pg. 309-310).

## **2. FROM ASIA**

### **2.1 India**

... There was a man who came to the world and affirmed that he was one with the Origin; he had come from that Source and that he had to return to that Source; in the period of time that was granted to him, he spent his life doing food, though nothing he did was programmed or really out of the ordinary, though all that he did was intense, complete, authentic. He was simply a man who went through the world without joining extremist groups, who was ready to forgive everything except hypocrisy and, though he made no discrimination, he always appeared to take sides with the disinherited and the oppressed, and as a disinherited and oppressed person he ended his life. He saw the Origin that originates everything and suffered the impact of the forces of evil, but had an unlimited confidence in the breath of that wind that he called the Spirit, which penetrates all places and so this was all he left as inheritance.

He looked upon himself as man: (82 times in the gospels). He liked this name, and he discovered for himself and for others that his humanity was none other than the other side of divinity, inseparable though different, so different that he was painfully conscious of the existence of sin. And, nevertheless, he saw in himself and in every other human being not evil but the kingdom of heaven. This is what he preached and practised.

His birth was obscure. He spent a good part of his life in the shade and his death was even more obscure. And, nevertheless, he never fell victim of frustration; when tempted by power he despised it; and when not successful, he dared to promise that he was going to be really present not only through the spirit but also through simple food and drink in community. He did not use violence and never allowed himself to be intimidated by power; he preached forgiveness and love; he pronounced words that he affirmed did not proceed from himself. He elaborated no doctrinal system; he spoke the language of his time. (RAIMON PANIKKAR, *La plenitud del hombre*, Barcelona 1998, pg. 165-166).

### **2.2 China**

The idea frequently troubles me that in the name of Jesus, we can say or do things that have very little to do with Him. Many Christians misunderstand the expression "Jesus full of the Spirit". Jesus was not "spiritual" in the sense of "pious". In fact, he seemed impious in the eyes of the spiritual leaders of his own religion...

The falsehood of the Kingdom of God is the empty promise made by those who possess religious privileges but live disconnected from the needs of those who are outside the religious "establishment". The truth of the Kingdom of God is that it belongs to the disinherited and the despised... I fear that we are too inclined to create an image of Jesus favourable to our own interests and in which Jesus Himself would not be able to recognise Himself... Jesus, by the strength of the Spirit, crossed the borders that separated Him from the others and revealed to us how He had the experience of the Truth and the Grace of God, through ways He could not have experimented in His own religious tradition. What makes Jesus radically different from the religious leaders of His time and made it possible

for Him to have an unrivalled impact is His profound commitment to the historic realities of His people...

Religion and legalism have often been strange companions that (according to a Chinese expression) "dream different dreams in the same bed". Jesus wished to deliver His people from this legalistic religion...

The farther Jesus is thrown away from the centre of the power of religious authorities, the more He is attracted towards women, men and children who, in His community were excluded from that centre, and also towards those who found themselves outside their own religious community. Those who according to religious authorities were outside the ambit of salvation, got to occupy the central place in His ministry of the Kingdom of God... Two thousand years later, an ever-increasing number of Christians in the Third World, keep discovering that Jesus, full of Grace and miracle of the saving Grace of God, is bigger than the apostles and wider than Christianity. We are realising that "to give testimony of Jesus up to the confines of the earth" (Acts 1,8) does not mean one has to transplant the culture of the Christian West, nor extend its theology and liturgy from the West and the North to the East and the South. It means giving testimony of the way Jesus would identify today the manifestations of the saving Grace of God in the world of today, and how He identifies Himself today with the men and women who work and suffer for what He proclaimed as "the Kingdom of God". (CHOAN SENG SONG, *Jesus in the power of the Spirit*, X, XI, 30, 52, 54, 56, 222, 315).

## NOTES

1 The words of Psalm 117 are applied to Jesus in the synoptic gospels (cf. e.g. Mark 12,10) in the Acts (4,11), and in 1 Pe 2,4 and 7. Partially also in Eph. 2,20. Together with Psalm 109 and the poems of the Servant of Isaias, it is one of the texts of the Old Testament that is most applied to Jesus.

2 He "handed Him over" says Paul; or "He did not even spare Him": see Rom. 8,32)

3 The letter speaks of "orphans and widows" who in the society of the Old Testament were the paradigm of exclusion on account of their total lack of resources. As far as "the criteria of this world" is concerned, they seem to be those that are censured next in order that they do not enter the Christian community: "to treat the rich better and to despise and oppress the poor".

4 The separation of the two words was impossible at that time.

5 Although the possibility cannot be excluded that the evangelists toned down the opposition of Jesus to the Romans since the gospels were to be spread in the empire. As they must have done, no doubt, with the figure of Pilate.

6 "You are the Messiah" in the synoptic narration, "Only You have words of eternal life" in the fourth gospel.

7 Speaking in parables does not seem to be the fruit of this "change of tactics" since it is chronologically before the crisis. It forms part of the colourful style of Jesus. But later the evangelists understood this language as a confirmation of the blindness of the leaders who "seeing do not see and hearing do not hear".

8 Simple but very heterogeneous: simple fishermen of the lake, some disciple of John, a tax collector ("publican"), some supporters of what later would evolve into the zealot movement.

9 For reasons too long to explain here, history critics prefer the chronology of John regarding the supper to that of the synoptics. The former does not consider it the Paschal supper whereas the latter do consider it so.

10 Papyrus found in Egypt in 1897. To judge by other already well known fragments of that same papyrus, the quoted text could be apocryphal called the Gospel of the Hebrews.

11 The Good Samaritan, the Pharisee and the Publican, the lost sheep, the Prodigal Son...

12 With respect to the topic of God which does not fit in here, I refer the reader to my chapter ("Jesus and God") in the book *Ten Words about Jesus of Nazareth*, Estella 1999, pg. 189-248.

13 Jesus does not speak about divorce (or separation by common agreement before an intolerable situation which did not exist in His world, given the inferiority of women), but of repudiation or "letter of dismissal" which that male society conceded to men for very small reasons and which left the woman totally unprotected. The verb "apollyomai" (Mt.5,32; 19,3; Mark 10,2ss; Luke 16,18) does not mean reciprocal action (separate themselves) but a unilateral action (let go). *Here* the matter at stake is the defence of women and not a norm of conjugal morals.

14 Besides describing a normal human reaction, there could be in that verb an allusion to Jer. 31,20.

15 Compare Mt. 7,22-23 or Luke 13,26-27 with Mt. 25,31ss)

16 This, contrary to the usual presentation, was not only a movement against the external pagan empire but also against internal religious injustice. The first action of the zealots when they attacked in the year 66 was to burn all the existing debt files in Jerusalem.

17 The priests and Pharisees did not enter the atrium of the pagan Pilate "so as not to defile themselves" (John 18,28). Jesus decides to go to the house of the Roman centurion - knowing well the Jewish mentality - and of this centurion He asks only one favour at a distance.

18 In *Concilium* no. 110 (1975) pg. 556.

19 I do not include that part of Spanish youth who have been denied not only a Christian formation (legitimate if that was the will of their parents) but deprived even of information, leaving them in an uprooted and ridiculous illiteracy in this matter.

20 One must painfully add that *the exercise and the figure* of the ministry of Peter in the Church of the second millennium appears very similar to the correction that Peter made to Jesus and which merited the wounded reaction of the latter: "Get away from Me because your way of thinking is not that of God".

21 One cannot help evoking the final scene of that excellent film ("La lengua de las mariposas") when the people scold the good master they had loved, moved by their fear of the coup d'état.

22 So in the measure in which the priesthood of Jesus is constituted by the surrender of His life, as the letter to the Hebrews states, it could be affirmed that practically only the women participated in His priesthood.

23 For other aspects of the later faith in Jesus I refer the reader to Booklet 26 of "Cristianisme i Justícia" (*Cristologia elemental*).

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